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IS THERE A FUTURE FOR CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING AFTER THE WANING OF ULTRAMONTANE MASS CATHOLICISM?

The publication in 1891 of the encyclical *Rerum novarum* is generally considered as the first and still most impressive official milestone of what is commonly called Catholic social teaching or doctrine[1]. Its development in the past century is no mere coincidence. My view is that classical social doctrine is the product of a specific form of modernity and, still more, of a specific form of Catholicism, an ultramontane mass Catholicism which flourished from about 1850 to 1960. After 1960 this form of Catholicism slid into a major crisis. As a consequence the classical social doctrine lost its durability. Will Catholic social doctrine and thinking, like the ultramontane form in which it emerged, disappear or linger on at the margin? Or will it, along with Catholicism in general, take on a new, viable form? That, I believe, is the issue at stake.

Although not a specialist, I will in this chapter attempt to provide a "historical-sociological perspective on Catholic social teaching". In the first part, I explore the rise and the undeniable vitality of Catholic social doctrine before 1960. The second part outlines briefly my interpretation of the major reasons for the crisis of the classical doctrine after 1960. The attempts at renewal are traced in the third part. I conclude with a speculative scenario.

I. Ultramontane Mass Catholicism as Seed-bed of the Classical Catholic Social Doctrine

In their well-known *Église et société économique*, Calvez and Perrin rightly portray Catholic social doctrine as "an historical answer to an historical problem"[2]. The social encyclical *Rerum novarum*, issued by

1. Salemink and Dorr give fine historical overviews: T. Salemink, *Katholieke kritiek op het kapitalisme 1891-1991. Honderd jaar debat over vrije markt en verzorgingsstaat*, Amersfoort-Leuven, Acco, 1991 and D. Dorr, *Option for the Poor. A Hundred Years of Vatican Social Teaching*, Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books, 1992.

2. J.-Y. Calvez, & J. Perrin, *Église et société économique. L'enseignement social des Papes de Léon XIII à Pie XII (1878-1958)*, Paris, Aubier, 1959, p. 22.

Leo XIII in 1891, sought to present the Catholic answer to a concrete problem, namely the "social question" in a context of "wild" capitalism. The encyclical letter triggered a huge response, and that not only in Catholic circles. Jean Jaurès called it "a socialist manifesto". The ultramontane Catholic Georges Goyau designated it as "the social dogma of the church". Cardinal Lecot summarised the encyclical under the title "catechism on social matters". Leroy-Beaulieu, an author of liberal-catholic posture, wrote: "Rome has spoken: the Church has henceforth a social doctrine"[3]. Indeed, it is fair to say that there was, before 1891, no Catholic social doctrine, in the sense of an ecclesiastically systematised, approved and propagated set of principles and statements on social and economic matters. Before that date these matters were, of course, extensively and controversially discussed by Catholics, but *Rerum novarum* gave them the eagerly awaited Roman frame of reference, a frame that was further developed in the course of the 20th century, in particular with the publication of the encyclical *Quadragesimo anno* in 1931 by Pius XI.

Interpreted in this way, responding to the social question with Catholic doctrine seems almost an obvious thing to have done. The lack of a comparable doctrine on the Protestant side, however, hints at deeper reasons. Explaining the formation of Catholic social doctrine is not possible without turning to the inner dynamics of pre-1960 Catholicism. My argument is that it is essential to understand that it was a new form of Catholicism, ultramontane mass Catholicism, that generated Catholic social doctrine. Classical Catholic social doctrine was linked in the most intimate way to ultramontane mass Catholicism. It presupposed a high degree of centralisation; it exemplified the ultramontane desire for doctrine; it was an element in the *reconquista* strategy of the church. It also constituted the frame of reference for the large Catholic social organisations which constituted the Catholic subculture.

1. *"Rome has spoken"*

Classical Catholic social doctrine is first and foremost a papal doctrine, forged and proclaimed by the popes themselves in encyclical letters. It is not disputed that a broad discussion was raging behind the scenes and that many specialists, particularly between 1930 and 1960, devoted themselves to this agenda. Yet without doubt, the centre of gravity lay in Rome. The encyclicals *Rerum novarum* and *Quadragesimo anno* largely instituted the doctrine. Leo XIII and his successors were apparently capable of issuing statements over a wide range of controversial topics and of declaring them binding for all the faithful. How this doctrine was to be translated into practice, and the extent to which the statements were binding, became hotly debated topics. The importance attached to the interpretations of the encyclicals shows clearly the centrality of the papal doctrine and the extent of centralisation in the Church. The context of modernity made such a high degree of centralisation possible.

3. Citations from J.-M. MAYEUR, *Catholicisme social et démocratie chrétienne. Principes romains, expériences françaises* (Histoire), Paris, Cerf, 1986, pp. 60-65.

It is true that a policy of centralisation had been pursued by Rome for centuries. For evidence of this claim one could go back even to the first centuries of Christianity[4]. Still, it is important to realise that the decisive drive towards centralisation was effected only in the 19th century[5]. In the 18th century, sixteen of the 26 German bishops refused to proclaim in their dioceses the papal condemnation of Febronius's Episcopal book of 1763[6]. A century later, all bishops submitted to the dogma of papal infallibility of 1870, although it had been fiercely contested at Vatican Council I[7].

The unprecedented centralisation of the church by Rome after 1800 was a predisposing condition for the emergence of Catholic social doctrine. From a distant, relatively unknown figure without much influence on the local churches, the pope became in the 19th century an all-powerful and intensely active leader intervening, if necessary, in the church affairs of even remote regions. It soon became a habit – encouraged by Rome! – of parties in dispute to invoke Rome in the hope of a Roman decision in their favour. And so, in the years after 1880, the pressure mounted on Rome from diverse sides to issue a solemn statement on the worker question. The local churches were becoming far more oriented towards Rome, that is, "ultramontane". At the same time, Rome became able to transfer its messages down to the rank and file with an unprecedented intensity. Like Rome, the dioceses were centralised. The priests received a much improved education. The rank and file were regularly mobilised, under supervision of the clergy, and better instructed in matters of faith and morals.

4. See, for example, L. LAEYENDECKER, *Om de beheersing van het charisma. Heil en macht in de R.K. Kerk*, Amsterdam, Koninklijke Nederlandse Academie voor Wetenschappen, 1993.

5. R. AUBERT, *De kerk van de crisis van 1848 tot Vaticanum II* (Geschiedenis van de kerk, 10), Hilversum-Antwerpen, P. Brand, 1974, pp. 71-87.

6. L.J. ROGIER, *De kerk in het tijdperk van verlichting en revolutie* (Geschiedenis van de kerk, 7), Hilversum-Antwerpen, P. Brand, 1974, p. 103.

7. AUBERT, *De kerk van de crisis* (n. 5), p. 84.

The encyclical *Rerum novarum* is a case in point. It demonstrates to what extent the Church had been rebuilt after the revolutionary era into a new, hierarchical mass organisation that could lead Catholics all over the world from its centre. Decreed in Latin, the encyclical was soon, in whole or in part, translated into numerous languages Its content was widely distributed in the form of tracts and books. Pastoral letters of the bishops supported the popularisation of the encyclical. Conferences and meetings were held throughout the Catholic world. In the Catholic labour movement commemoration of the encyclical became a yearly ritual. Overall, Catholics raised pope and encyclical to a mythical level, proclaiming Leo XIII "Pope of the workers" and hailing *Rerum novarum* as the *magna carta* (*QA* 39).

2. *A Desire for Doctrine*

The label "doctrine" indicates that Catholic social teaching was not meant as an amalgam of scattered declarations without coherence or profound implications. The aim was to establish a systematic set of authoritative instructions. As a technical term, the label "Catholic social doctrine" spread during the inter-war period. During the pontificate of Pius XII it was used frequently and emphatically[8].

It can be safely claimed that already Leo XIII wanted to set out in *Rerum novarum* a systematic scheme of principles. His aims are clearly stated in the introductory paragraphs of his encyclical: "Therefore, venerable brethren, as on former occasions...we... have issued letters on political power, on human liberty, on the Christian constitution of the State, and on similar subjects, so now we have thought it useful to speak on the condition of labour ... in order that there may be no mistake as to the principles which truth and justice dictate for its settlement" (*RN* 1)[9]. Even today John Paul II has stated in his recent social encyclicals *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (1987) and *Centesimus annus* (1991) that Catholic social teaching is a rich "doctrinal corpus" (*SRS* 1) and that it "is an essential part of the Christian message" (*CA* 5). This profound desire to formulate the Catholic response to social problems in terms of a Church doctrine which is binding for all the faithful is related intimately to ultramontane Catholicism.

8. CALVEZ & PERRIN, *Église et société économique* (n. 2), pp. 17-20.

9. All citations of the social encyclicals will be drawn from D.J. O'BRIEN & T.A. SHANNON (eds.), *Catholic Social Thought. The Documentary Heritage*, Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books, 1992.

Given my lack of knowledge of historical theology, it is with some hesitation that I present a sketchy historical outline of this desire for doctrine in the 19th and 20th centuries. It is true that the early Church councils elaborated and defined some of the basic dogmas of Christianity. The ecumenical councils of the 4th and the 5th centuries are, in formulating the Trinitarian and Christological doctrines, of central importance here. But by the end of the Patristic period (usually dated to the eighth century) there was a sense that the basic doctrines were in place. Throughout the Middle Ages, the Church left the development of theology more or less to the university theologians and was more concerned with spreading spirituality and establishing moral and disciplinary control over the faithful. On the doctrinal front, efforts were mostly limited to the demarcation from heresies which were regarded as dangerous. Even the Council of Trent was more directed towards the demarcation from Protestantism and towards organisational and pastoral measures. It is only with the slow rise of modernity after 1500 that Catholic theology, challenged by Protestantism and by the Enlightenment, came to be seen as an instrument of the Church with the task of codifying the content in a set of positive, controllable statements. Fundamental theology became dogmatic theology. The drive towards systematisation and doctrine was further enhanced by the rise of modern science and modern philosophy – e.g. Leibniz, Hegel, and in the 19th century by the dominance of neo-Thomism[10].

The increasing dogmatisation of theology went hand in hand with the increasing prominence of the pope. Dogmatic theology became a Roman matter. With the transformation of the Church into a hierarchical mass organisation, Rome and the Pope finally had the means to inculcate their opinions throughout the Church. To outline the basic tenets on an issue encyclicals became favourite devices. Gregory XVI and Pius IX had done the groundwork. Beginning with *Aeterni Patris,* the encyclical by which he imposed Thomism on Catholic education, Leo XIII used this ideological means extensively to foster an all-embracing teaching, covering all aspects of life in modernity. No pope before or after him issued so many encyclical letters. During a pontificate of 25 years, no less than 86 encyclicals were proclaimed[11], that is, more than 3 per year. It was an important component of the overall "Leonine strategy", the rolling back

10. F.-X. KAUFMANN, *Theologie in soziologischer Sicht*, Freiburg, Herder, 1973, pp. 78-92.

11. J.T. ELLIS, *From the Enlightment to the Present. Papal Policy Seen through the Encyclicals*, in *Catholic Historical Review* 69 (1983), no. 1, 51-58, esp. 54.

of secular modernity with the means made available by modernity[12]. The dogmatisation of issues and its publication in the form of encyclicals became a centrepiece of papal ideological politics. As Leo XIII had taken the lead through previous encyclicals on topics such as politics and freemasonry, with *Rerum novarum* he now turned to social issues. Until Vatican Council II, his successors would continue this strategy and this use of encyclicals.

3. *Instaurare Omnia in Christo*

As early as 1885, Leo XIII had hinted that he wished to make a major pronouncement on the social question[13]. The publication of *Rerum novarum* thus did not come as a complete surprise. Nevertheless, the willingness of so many Catholics to accept the declarations of the pope on such a delicate and controversial issue cannot but strike us today. The more so because the social question, at first sight, seemed to lie miles away from the more obviously religious matters with which the Church was usually concerned. Finally, in a Church that adored tradition an encyclical on the social question was thematically unprecedented. How can this obvious and self-assured "intrusion" into non-religious spheres of life be explained?

The motto of the ultramontane Catholics of the 19th and 20th centuries was *Instaurare omnia in Christo* ("To restore all things in Christ") – to reconstruct the whole order of modern society along Christian lines. With a sense of mission and triumphalism, the Catholic Church called for a rechristianisation of modernity. She claimed for herself the right and duty to intervene in all matters of life, profane as well as religious. In so doing, the Church continued an old fundamental conviction. In the Middle Ages a protracted investiture struggle between the Holy Roman emperor and the Roman pontiff had been waged. After 1800 the Church attacked modern secular currents, and modernity in general as the new Antichrist. In order to roll back this "lethal" threat, the Church wanted to give guidance, then, to all sectors of life, from education through politics to social and economic issues, to the dismay of her adversaries who advocated a complete separation of religion and politics. So Leo XIII proclaimed self-consciously: "We approach the subject with confidence, and in the exercise of the rights which belong

12. B. MACSWEENEY, *Roman Catholicism. The Search for Relevance*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1980, pp. 61-91; E. POULAT, *Église contre bourgeoisie. Introduction au devenir du catholicisme actuel* (Religion et sociétés), Castermann, Tournai, 1977

13. MAYEUR, *Catholicisme social et démocratie chrétienne* (n. 3), p. 50, no. 15.

to us" (*RN* 13). Forty years later, referring to Leo XIII, Pius XI wrote that "it is our right and our duty to deal authoritatively with social and economic problems" (*QA* 41).

So far I have emphasised the continuity in the totalising world view of the Church. But it would be wrong to overlook the different way in which this remarkable totalising capacity of the Church was brought into practice. First of all, it was no longer a struggle fought between nobility and clergy. Instead, the whole mass of the population was called into action. The social encyclicals called on all Catholics to restore the Christian order through Catholic action. In this respect it is significant that both Leo XIII and Pius XI spoke extensively and positively of the benefits of (Catholic) associations, those eminently modern institutions. That the two encyclicals were so well received by the rank and file within the Church and gave such a strong impulse to the development of Catholic associations and organisations shows the profound modernisation of Catholicism after 1800[14].

In the second place, the context of modernity brought the Church into a completely new situation. The pre-modern Church had been able to play a leading role because she had taken, besides her religious role, care of formal education, charity, science and local administration and because she was closely intertwined with the world of politics. The increasing institutional differentiation after 1800 – the differentiation of science, education, social care from religion, and the widening separation from politics and economics – made religion a more purely religious matter. One would expect then – and the proponents of a secular modernity did expect it – that the Church would withdraw into this "purely" religious heart of the matter. But actually, that didn't happen. Strengthened by its transformation into a mass organisation, the Church, and more particularly the popes, set themselves up as the leaders and true guides of the world. At least in the Catholic communities, this posture succeeded remarkably well. And where these communities had a dominant position, as in Austria and Belgium around 1900, the Church was even able to regain the leading cultural position in society.

To give guidance and to control the Catholics, in particular the wide ranging network of Catholic organisations in all spheres of life, thus became a matter of paramount importance for the Church. Its leading position, and in the end its objective of restoring the Catholic order of society, was at stake. As we have seen, the proclamations of encyclical

14. S. HELLEMANS, *Religieuze modernisering*, Utrecht, Katholieke Theologische Universiteit, 1997.

letters, in order to outline the main principles that should guide the Catholics and their many organisations, was a prime instrument in this strategy. This applies especially to the social sphere. Here the unity of Catholics, deemed necessary as a precondition for the *reconquista* of modernity, was seriously threatened. It was also in this field that the biggest mass organisations of ultramontane mass Catholicism were generated.

4. *Symbiotic Relation With the Catholic Labour Movement*

So we come to the last distinctive ultramontane characteristic, which was strongly related to the genesis and the flowering of classical Catholic social doctrine: the growth of Catholic mass social organisations. Usually separated by class – as organisations of industrial workers, peasants, middle classes and employer – they rose within the Catholic community after 1850 and more especially after 1900. With membership in many cases going well over the hundred thousand, they became a significant feature of Catholic life. Hence the imperative of timely Church supervision and presence. In most countries the class factor introduced tensions among the leaders of these organisations. The leaders of these organisations – including their chaplains, nicknamed in Germany "the cardinals" (*Verbandskardinäle*) – were even more powerful than many a diocesan bishop. Moreover, in the eyes of the Church, the temptation of the secular world to which membership and leaders of organisations were exposed had to be checked with equally strong religious incentives. Catholic social doctrine provided an overall ideological frame for this strongly felt imperative of Church supervision. It assigned to these huge organisations a legitimised position as an important component of the Catholic world, under the authority of the Church. This was to be an outstanding achievement of classical social doctrine.

In particular, the Catholic labour movement maintained a close, even symbiotic relation with classical social doctrine[15]. For a long time, the presence of the movement within the Church was viewed with unease. *Rerum novarum* gave the Catholic labour movement a much needed papal legitimisation with the well known addition, inserted at the last minute by the Pope himself, that associations could be formed by "workmen alone" (*RN* 36). In the young and fragile Catholic labour movement, *Rerum novarum* was soon seen as a baptismal certificate.

15. P. PASTURE, *Histoire du syndicalisme chrétien international. La difficile recherche d'une troisième voie* (Chemins de la mémoire), Paris, L'Harmattan, 1999. Chapter 1 gives an international overview.

Recent historical research may have falsified this thesis and may characterise it as an example of "invented tradition"[16]. But even if it is true that "*Rerum novarum* was only one crystallising moment in the development of the Christian labour movement"[17], the invented tradition demonstrates nevertheless the importance the labour movement attached to *Rerum novarum* and to Catholic social doctrine in general. Catholic social doctrine remained in fact so basic for the workings of the Catholic labour movement that A. Brys, the dean of the ACW in Belgium – a country with a very strong Catholic labour movement – could still state in the 1950's that the Catholic labour movement was the "instrument for the realisation of Catholic social doctrine"[18]. Moreover, it is clear that the papal guidelines concerning private property, the principle of subsidiarity, the theory of justice and the moral duty of class co-operation, strongly influenced the world view and actions of the movement.

Following the pre-eminent position of the Church in these Catholic organisations – the organisations within the Catholic world – it was almost inevitable that the Church hierarchy would give paramount attention to social issues. Any other response would have been puzzling.

II. The End of Classical Social Doctrine After 1960

Ultramontane mass Catholicism, the religious formation within which the classical Catholic social doctrine had emerged and prospered, slid into a deep crisis after 1960. Given the intimate connection, it is no wonder that Catholic social doctrine would also be seriously affected. It would be criticised as a conservative ideology, moralist instead of emancipatory[19]. In the Catholic world, and more particularly in the Catholic labour movement, it lost its hold as a frame of reference[20]. The question then becomes whether Catholic social teaching can retain its vitality outside its context of origin. Can it still direct people and eventually mobilise them or will it, with the decline of ultramontane mass Catholicism,

16. E. HOBSBAWM & T. RANGER (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Past and Present Publications), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983.

17. E. GERARD (ed.), *De christelijke arbeidersbeweging in België* (KADOC-Studies, 11), 2 vol., Leuven, Universitaire Pers, 1991, p. 16.

18. P. PASTURE, *Kerk, politiek en sociale actie. De unieke positie van de christelijke arbeidersbeweging in België* (HIVA-reeks, 14), Leuven, Garant, 1992, p. 208.

19. M.-D. CHENU, *La "doctrine sociale" de l'Église comme idéologie* (Essais), Paris, Cerf, 1979.

20. P. PASTURE, *Het A.C.V. en de katholieke sociale leer. Hoe hemel en aarde verzoenen?*, in *De Gids op Maatschappelijk Gebied* 82 (1991), no. 5, 447-465.

become outdated, like many other aspects of pre-Vatican II Catholicism, such as the role given to the Feast of Christ the King in the late 1920s and 1930s? In the preceding section I argued that Catholic social doctrine is the historic-specific product of an historic-specific form of Catholicism. My next step is to explore the ferment within post-1960 Catholicism with particular attention to the consequence for Catholic social teaching.

1. *A New Era in Modernity*

The preface to the study of the changes within Catholicism is the more general change within the wider society. Modernity as a societal formation after 1960 entered a new era characterised by generalised mass consumption, secularisation, individualisation and dissolution of class cultures, changes which had a direct impact on the status of Catholic social doctrine. Indeed, its impact before 1960 was also partly due to the prominence over a number of decades of one major issue, the social question. From the last quarter of the 19th century until well after the Second World War, the social question was widely considered to constitute the central contentious issue of modern society. This long-lasting emphasis did heighten the sense of continuity, so beloved by the Church. This all changed quickly after 1960. The social question, which had for a long time been seen as the Achilles heel of modernity, receded or changed in form.

The labour-capital polarity remained of course an important source of conflict. But on the one hand, new social problems which could not be properly reduced to the old social question (like the new poverty and social exclusion, stress and alienation, mass migration, violence, globalisation), made themselves felt. And on the other hand, tendencies and problems which undermined the centrality of the class conflict came to the fore: the de-industrialisation and tertiarisation of the economy, the individualisation process, new quests like feminism and ecology. The social question was no longer considered to be the root question around which all other problems gravitated.

Also, the way in which CST sought to deal with the social question had become outdated. With its combination of religious-moral guidance and corporatist organisation, Catholic social doctrine presented itself for a long time as the orderly "third way" between liberal capitalism and state socialism[21]. In the meantime, a socially corrected market economy,

21. J. VERSTRAETEN, *De sociale leer van de katholieke kerk en de 'derde weg'*, in L. BOUCKAERT & G. BOUCKAERT (eds.), *Metafysiek en engagement. Een personalistische visie op gemeenschap en economie*, Leuven, Acco, 1992, pp. 51-63.

blunting the sharp edges of the social question, had been established in the West. Although many issues remain unsolved and new ones have arisen, few people think nowadays that the key to their solution is to be found in religious guidance or a corporatist order. It is therefore acknowledged that Catholic social doctrine has thus both lost its central problem and the plausibility of its solutions.

2. *From Ultramontane Mass Catholicism to a Pluralist Catholicism*

It is my contention that the new era in which modernity was making its appearance in the sixties brought also a fundamental transformation of Catholicism. Ultramontane mass Catholicism collapsed and in consequence, as I see it, Catholic social doctrine suffered a severe setback. The Catholic Church has remained highly centralised after 1960. At the same time it is true that papal declarations have lost the impact they once had on the consciousness and behaviour of Catholics. In retrospect, the encyclical *Humanae vitae* (1968) can be seen as a watershed. Before this encyclicals were welcomed with reverence, sometimes with sheer enthusiasm, as was still the case with *Populorum progressio* (1967). Thereafter a negligent or even hostile attitude developed. The most recent social encyclicals have been met by a remarkable silence. Three major social encyclicals of John Paul II – *Laborem exercens* (1981), *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (1987) and *Centesimus annus* (1991) – caused much excitement within the wider Church and society. They were reported in the newspapers. Some ritual attention was given to them in the remaining Catholic social movements[22]. But they did not have the impact within or outside the Church, of the encyclicals of 1891 or 1931. The loss of impact of the papal declarations on social issues is not an isolated fact, nor, indeed, unconnected to moral doctrine on family and sexual behaviour, which held sway before the late 1960s but is now little observed either. More generally, the stimulating strength of Rome, once the source of universalisation throughout the whole Church of initiatives like the Sacred Heart devotion, frequent communion (see the decrees of Pius X) or Catholic action, has faded away. Rome can still dispose its old organisational apparatus to discipline theologians, but nonetheless it has introduced organisational changes both of a positive kind (the creation of new structures incorporating some lay voice) and negative

22. J. VERSTRAETEN, *'Sollicitudo Rei Socialis' en de christelijke sociale bewegingen in Vlaanderen*, in J. BULCKENS & P. COOREMAN (eds.), *Kerkelijk leven in Vlaanderen anno 2000. Opstellen voor Jan Kerkhofs* (Niké-reeks. Didachè), Leuven, Acco, 1989, pp. 189-195.

(like dismantling older structures such as the Congregation of the Faith). But these are self-protective measures. Far more significant is the fact that Rome is no longer able effectively to promote and propel world-wide devotional and religious activities as it routinely used to do prior to 1960. The loss of strength of the Church's centre is not due to a lack of dynamism on the part of the Popes or to misguided policy, but rather to the fact that a whole historical formation, namely, a hierarchy-driven mass Catholicism has come to an end. A pluralist Catholicism which looks less to Rome appears to have taken its place, one inhabited by individualised Catholics who, living in high modernity, keep distance from all organisations, including the Church.

The first target of Catholic social doctrine, the world of the Catholic social organisations, has also changed fundamentally. In a number of countries like the Netherlands and Germany they have nearly disappeared. In some other countries, like for instance Belgium, powerful movements are still active[23]. The movements in these last cases, however, have become thoroughly emancipated from ecclesiastical supervision and are no longer looking to Catholic social doctrine for guidance[24]. Even in its former strongholds, Catholic social doctrine has since the sixties become discredited and has thus lost its privileged operational base.

Finally, the broader theoretical frame of Catholic social doctrine, neo-Thomism and natural law doctrine, has come under harsh criticism and is almost removed from the theological scene. A new theological paradigm, equally shared, has not yet emerged. It can no longer be assumed that one will emerge. Indeed, an ecclesiastically-favoured style of theology, neo-Thomism, was also a characteristic feature of ultramontane mass Catholicism[25]. Now, instead of one dominant theory, many theological currents of a wide variety compete. Since Rome can no longer draw on one dominant theological language game, the possibility of developing a doctrine which aspires to stand above the quarrelling parties has become seriously questioned. Even the increased use of the Bible in papal documents and allocutions, evident since the Second Vatican Council, because it is subject to different interpretations is not yet a secure framework.

23. P. PASTURE, *Diverging Paths: The Development of Catholic Labour Organisations in France, the Netherlands and Belgium since 1944*, in *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 88 (1994), no. 1, 54-90.

24. PASTURE, *Kerk, politiek en sociale actie* (n. 18), describes in detail the evolution in Belgium.

25. P. THIBAULT, *Savoir et pouvoir. Philosophie thomiste et politique cléricale au XIXe siècle* (Histoire et sociologie de la culture, 2), Québec, Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1972.

III. Catholic Social Teaching After 1960

The force of this argument about the strong links between Catholic social teaching and ultramontane Catholicism might suggest that there is no option but for the former to die with the disappearance of the latter. The soil of Catholic social teaching's flourishing became infertile after the 1960s and the most that could be expected is that it would linger on at the margins. Social phenomena, though, which are anchored deeply in a social environment, do not disappear just like that. To meet changing conditions, all sorts of adaptation strategies are tried. These transformational strategies can succeed or fail. When we apply this view to Catholic social teaching, what transformational strategies have been tried out in the last decades? Have these strategies been able to give new life to Catholic social teaching?

1. *New Themes*

In classical social doctrine and in modern society before 1960, the social question was considered crucial. After 1960, new themes come to the fore in the new era of modernity: Third World development, participation, disarmament and global world order, ecology and feminism, living in a mass consumer society. This agenda is also addressed by the Church, though selectively in the light of its understanding of its own role. To issues which are sensitive to the Church, like participation and feminism, the hierarchy does not pay much attention. When it does, as with the participation issue which became unavoidable sometime in the late sixties, the Church took great care not to widen intra-church criticism. On the other side, the Church is eager to take up international issues like world peace and world development. *Mater et Magistra* (1961) quickly took up the themes in the so-called "first development decade", followed by *Pacem in terris* (1963) and *Populorum progressio* (1967). Later they were extensively up-dated in *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (1987)[26]. The presence of a well-developed classical Catholic social doctrine eased the transition to international issues such as international social justice, "option for the poor". Moreover, through the rapid internal decolonisation of the Church and the sheer demographic weight of the Third World churches, the Church quickly evolved in the sixties from a Western, Italian-based institution to a genuine world Church. The multinational Second Vatican Council was important in this respect.

26. J. VERSTRAETEN, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis. Een nieuwe stap in de ontwikkeling van de sociale leer van de Kerk*, Leuven, Acco, 1988.

The Catholic Church, while introducing new themes, was also anxious to emphasise continuity with the past. The new themes are throughout presented as legitimate extensions of the old subjects. So, to give an example, *Populorum progressio* (1967), before engaging with the topic of world-wide development, states: "Today the principal fact that we must all recognise is that the social question has become world-wide" (*PP* 3). Continuity is stressed through the many references to the previous social encyclicals, especially to *Rerum novarum*. A tradition has moreover been built up since *Quadragesimo anno* (1931) to refer in the title and/or the year of publication to the great encyclical of Leo XIII. So *Mater et Magistra* appears in 1961, the apostolic constitution *Octogesima adveniens* in 1971, *Laborem exercens* in 1981, and *Centesimus annus* in 1991. An exception took place with *Populorum progressio* (1967), a document issued in the wake of *Gaudium et spes* (1965), the pastoral constitution of the Second Vatican Council (see esp. Part II, Ch. 5). In order to stress the continuity with *Populorum progressio*, *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (1987) was even predated – the murder attempt on the Pope had delayed its publication. The eagerness to stress continuity illustrates a typical characteristic of Catholic discourse: innovation, especially doctrinal innovation, is suspect and has to be legitimised by rooting it firmly in tradition. "In effect", writes John Paul II in *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, "continuity and renewal are a proof of the perennial value of the teaching of the Church" (*SRS* 3). Since the Vatican II Council the term favoured is "living tradition".

In this way, a wide variety of new themes are smuggled in, after 1960, under the old labels "Catholic social doctrine" or "Catholic social teaching". Even far-reaching modifications are adopted with little reference to earlier rejection, as was the case with human rights, particularly the right of freedom of conscience and freedom of religion. In the same way, the once prominent option of the so-called "third way" between capitalism and socialism, has been implicitly given up[27]. An explicit break with the past was actually announced only once. With the harsh critics of the sixties in mind, Paul VI in *Octogesima adveniens* (1971) came near to detaching himself from the classical form and title of Catholic social doctrine. Papal social teaching is minimised here as a source of inspiration (*OA* 1). Further on it is said: "It is up to the Christian communities... to discern the options and commitments which are called for". In so doing, they can, though, "draw principles of reflection, norms of judgement and directives for action from the social teaching of

27. VERSTRAETEN, *De sociale leer van de katholieke kerk en de 'derde weg'* (n. 21).

the Church" (*OA* 4). This turn towards decentralisation and autonomy – it is significant that the document was issued as an apostolic constitution and not as an encyclical – was reversed under John Paul II, who again stresses the doctrinal character of the tradition of social teaching since Leo XIII, while dwelling on the new themes that were introduced after 1960. On the whole, however, his encyclicals are not innovative.

2. *New Actors and Styles*

Although there was a good deal of tension and debate within the Catholic Church on social issues before and after the great social encyclicals, classical social doctrine overwhelmingly focussed around the papal writings, beginning with Leo XIII. Given Vatican strategy at the time of Leo XIII, social teaching was an expression of ultramontane mass Catholicism. But this situation changed in a major way after Vatican II. *Populorum progressio* (1967) still profited from the *élan* of the Council. It was a refreshing and enthusiastic plea for Third World development and a chief contribution from the Church in fostering "integral development". It was to be the last social encyclical to elicit much enthusiasm. It succeeded in giving a strong impetus to Third World interests among the churches in the West as well as in the non-Western world. But after that, the initiating or at least generating strength of Rome seemed to evaporate. It is significant that in this respect the project of the re-evangelisation of the Western world, so beloved of John Paul II, failed to take off. Correspondingly, the social encyclicals of John Paul II have failed to draw much attention outside the world of specialists[28].

On the other hand, the decline of Rome's authority since the late sixties made room for new actors. Following the liberalisation movement of the sixties, and the upgrading of the role of the bishops and Bishops' conferences by the Vatican Council, local churches often had more room for manoeuvre. Sometimes, initiatives were spreading laterally through the world-wide Church even in spite of strong suspicions in Rome, as in the case of liberation theology and the basic communities movement. This trend towards more autonomy was stimulated by the growing presence of lay Catholics on Church commissions and standing committees, who brought secular and professional expertise to bear on issues of the day made and their influence particularly felt in the realm of Catholic social teaching and action.

28. See VERSTRAETEN, *'Sollicitudo Rei Socialis' en de christelijke sociale bewegingen in Vlaanderen* (n. 22) on local responses to *Sollicitudo rei socialis*.

Before 1960 most pastoral letters on social issues by bishops or by Bishops' conferences simply reiterated and popularised papal teaching[29]. But after the 60s the second tier of hierarchical authority moved to greater self-confidence. In all loyalty to the Pope, bishops and conferences of bishops acted more frequently on their own initiative, taking up issues which are barely dealt with by Rome and treating them in a self-conscious, creative way[30]. Moreover, some of these pastoral letters have received world-wide attention. The letter of the US conference of bishops on *The Challenge of Peace* became a model for similar letters in the European countries[31]. *Economic Justice for All* of 1986, again a letter from the US bishops, equally made the tour of the world[32], and the 1996 Statement by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England & Wales, *The Common Good and the Catholic Church's Social Teaching,* received also widespread publicity.

More independent initiatives on social thought and issues have also been developing on non-official levels. Before 1960 Catholic intellectuals had to think and act within the narrow limits set by papal teaching on social issues, but since then many theologians, ethicists and social scientists have been adopting an autonomous and more critical role. The present collection contains many references to such work since the 1960s, and the conference in Cambridge which led to this book, inspired by a desire to explore and re-dynamise Catholic non-official social thought, also represents an effort at imaginative middle-level thinking complementary to the official social teaching. I want to stress that overall, one can see these and other post-1960 phenomena as symbolising a move from situations of domination and subservience towards relative positions in a debate. The task of "re-imagining Catholicism"[33] is no longer exclusively centred on popes: it is possible to see it taken up by bishops and lay people as well.

At the same time there has been a significant change in the style and ambition of official social teaching itself. The subtitle of *Quadragesimo anno* proclaimed the older theme: "On Reconstructing the Social Order

29. See the documentation by the UNION INTERNATIONALE D'ÉTUDES SOCIALES, *La hiérarchie catholique devant le problème social*, Paris, Spes, 1931.

30. For Belgium, see K. DOBBELAERE, *Over het publieke spreken van de Rooms Katholieke Kerk in een geseculariseerd België*, in *Onze Alma Mater* 53 (1999), no. 2, 204-232.

31. E. HERR, *Sauver la paix. Qu'en dit l'Église?* (Chrétiens aujourd'hui. N.S., 5), Namur, Culture et vérite, 1991, pp. 81-130.

32. Both letters are reprinted in O'BRIEN & SHANNON, *Catholic Social Thought* (n. 9).

33. E. KENNEDY, *Re-Imagining American Catholicism. The American Bishops and their Pastoral Letters*, New York, 1985.

and Perfecting It in Comformity with the Precepts of the Gospel". Building on the "unchanging and unchangeable" (*QA* 19) principles, deriving from divine Revelation and natural law, the pathways in the social realm leading to the re-christianisation of modern society, were outlined: strict observance of Catholic morals on the individual level, co-operation between workers and employers on the meso-level, a corporatist organisation of the economy on the macro-level. Catholic social doctrine was the only orderly and safe "third way" between capitalism and socialism. In the eyes of Pius XI, the doctrine was the only antidote "to preserve the human family from dire havoc (*ab immani prorsus exitio*)" (*QA* 144).

After 1960 this *reconquista* approach was given up. The struggle for the retrieval of a natural, Christian order, which had been disrupted by modernity, gave way to a vision of evangelical testimony and commitment in this world. The deductive reasoning from the heights of natural law and Christian philosophy gave way before evangelical values, biblical references, the search for "the signs of the time" and the pressing appeal of the ideal of the Kingdom of God. Doctrinal statements receded before the appeal to values "to all men of good will", a clause regularly added since *Pacem in terris* (1963). The new style has been maintained in the social encyclicals of John Paul II, even if he continues to stress their doctrinal aspect.

IV. Conclusion and Challenges Ahead

After 1960 the Popes continue to publish social encyclicals and documents. The speed of publication is remarkably higher then before. In these documents they repeatedly refer, always in a respectful manner, to their predecessors, so that at first glance changes seem to have only minor importance. I have tried to show in this chapter that this appearance of continuity is a false one. It is a typical Roman ecclesiastical style used to legitimate her statements and positions. The appearance of continuity is in part also due to the fact that Catholic social teaching is mostly analysed only at a conceptual level, as a stream of documents. What surprises me in is the eagerness with which many thoughtful commentators are ready to go along with this claim of continuity. Even an author like Dorr (1992) depicts Catholic social teaching, in his deservedly famous book, as a "coherent and organic tradition"[34], undergoing after

34. DORR, *Option for the Poor* (n. 1), p. 352.

1960 "one major change of direction"[35], reflecting the changing of sides on the part of the church from being a natural ally of the established forces of society to an "option for the poor".

In my opinion, the changes are much more profound. The whole functioning of Catholic social teaching, conceptually and in practice, has changed seriously since 1960:
a shift from a highly focussed and specific issue of class conflict to a heterogeneous collection of issues, loosely united by a humanist-religious perspective;
a move from a tight theological straitjacket towards speaking in many tongues, with an appeal to basic values and to commitment in the modern world replacing the previous deductive outlining of an alternative Christian order;
a retreat of top-down discourse in favour of a broad range of semi-autonomous discourses involving multiple actors, the Roman voice more as *primus inter pares*;
a tendency of the Catholic sub-culture and especially the Catholic social movements to disappear or detach themselves from the Church, resulting in a reduction of the impact of Catholic social teaching on the ground;
a marked decline in ultramontane mass Catholicism, with the Church as a hierarchical mass organisation, and hence in the previous operational base of Catholic social teaching.

Yet I wish to add immediately that this doesn't imply the end of Catholic social teaching and thinking. From the side of society, also from non-Catholics, there is still a demand for the Church to make public statements on burning contemporary issues. Moreover, it should be acknowledged that the Church after 1960, in contrast with the 19th century, has not hesitated to address swiftly many new issues of present-day society. This is in part almost certainly due to the presence of the modern tradition of classical social teaching. This made the Church sensitive to social problems and to their structural base (see the concept of "structural sin" in *Sollicitudo rei socialis*). Furthermore, the basic documents of Catholic social teaching – of course *Rerum novarum* but also *Gaudium et spes* and *Populorum progressio* – continue to inspire and to serve as models for present-day interventions and declarations of Catholics. So, at first sight, there are many reasons not to fear a quick and complete passing away of Catholic social teaching and thinking. The centenary tradition, which forces the Church to face the structural social problems of modern society, is still being continued, although it is now set at a

35. *Ibid.*, p. 379.

lower pitch and is advancing in scattered battle order and in a more undogmatic way, reflecting changes in the wider Church.

A final comment. In my opinion, important though the modifications in themes, actors and styles may be, these are not sufficient for Catholic social thinking to remain vital. Given the profound changes after 1960, the advent of a new era in modernity and in Catholicism, more far-reaching transformations seem necessary. First, lack of intellectual quality is surely a threat to the future of Catholic social thinking. People have a right to expect rigorous answers to real questions, Shallow thinking can be countered only by more international and interdisciplinary co-operation between social scientists and theologians, to include significant Third World countries and interests, and to encompass the perspective of an impending world-wide modernity, with its many concomitant problems. Global Catholicism is geographically and institutionally well suited to tackle the major challenges ahead (like mass migration and multiculturalism) from such a perspective. Second, Rome has not fully acknowledged or accepted the moves towards greater pluralism, participation and semi-autonomy outlined above, and it lacks a clear view on its own position in the new constellation. I believe Rome could yet remain a prime force in the social field provided it can move forward in these ways. For example, given the scattered contributions which are being made all over the world, Rome is still best suited to act as promoter and co-ordinator of world-wide discussions, and to synthesise them into major documents.

A final challenge is even more vital, though I see no simple answer to it. Since Catholics, let alone the population at large, can no longer be considered to constitute "auxiliary troops", the question now is how to draw attention to Catholic social teaching in a semi-secularised world, how to move people into action, how to mobilise good intentions. A certain solidity of Catholic social teaching is essential. The existence of models, institutions and groups that give us a glimpse of what can be done is important. The organisation of a permanent discussion, consultation and co-operation process on social issues will also contribute to the profile of Catholic social teaching. As Hengsbach, re-phrasing MacLuhan, stated: "The process is the message"[36]. Above all, daring to mobilise people at crucial moments in the face of real problems will be essential. Catholic mobilisation of the rank and file was a major strength

36. F. HENGSBACH, *Der Prozeß ist die Botschaft. Zur Pluralit?t der Subjekte kirchlicher Soziallehre*, in M. HEIMBACH-STEINS, A. LIENKAMP & J. WIEMEYER (eds.), *Brennpunkt Sozialethik. Theorien, Aufgaben, Methoden*, Freiburg, Herder, 1995, pp. 69-85.

in the past. But today the Church is hesitant to mobilise Catholics on social matters, as the ambivalent attitude to the peace issue in the eighties has shown. But if Catholic social teaching wants to have an impact, it will have to search for issues and occasions where it can mobilise to make its voice heard on behalf of its social vision. If not, its social declarations will be met, like the social encyclicals of John Paul II, with friendly disregard.

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SOURCES AND STRUCTURES